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American Tells of Efforts to Recruit Him as Soviet Spy

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WASHINGTON, March 25 — Michael W. Straight, an American writer whose name has come up in the latest British espionage inquiry, said today that his early acquaintance with several British agents of the Soviet Union led to the exposure of a Communist spy ring in London 17 years ago.

Mr. Straight got to know the future Soviet agents Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt when he was studying at Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1934 to 1937. He was alluded to, but not named, by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 in a speech to Parliament as the source of new information that had led to the 1963 confession by Mr. Blunt.

Mr. Straight's involvement in the Blunt case, and by extension in the case of the late Sir Roger Hollis, former head of M.I.5, the counterintelligence branch, is described in a book now being serialized in *The Daily Mail* of London.

In a telephone interview from his home in Bethesda, Md., Mr. Straight, who is 64 years old, said Mr. Blunt had tried hard

to recruit him as a Soviet agent in 1937 at the height of the Spanish Civil War, but that he had declined. He said that it was his belief Mr. Blunt, an art historian, had been drawn into Soviet service by Guy Burgess.

Met Through Cambridge Group

"I met them through the Apostles," he said, referring to a Cambridge intellectual circle. He said it had not occurred to him to report the initial recruiting attempts until much later.

Mr. Straight, who became an editor of *The New Republic* after World War II, said he had encountered Guy Burgess in 1948 and again in 1951 and threatened to expose him both times unless he quit the British diplomatic service. He said he was turned away by the British Embassy when he tried to tell about the recruiting attempts after Mr. Burgess disappeared and later turned up in Moscow.

When he was asked in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy to serve as chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts he went to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who was serving in the White House, and said he

could not take the job and then told of the Soviet recruitment efforts.

Mr. Straight said Mr. Schlesinger sent him to the Federal Bureau of Investigation where he gave an exhaustive account of the affair. The F.B.I. informed the British Secret Service of his disclosures and at the request of British authorities he traveled to London to repeat his story.

Mr. Straight said that until 1963 Mr. Blunt, who had long been under suspicion, had refused to admit his connections with the Soviet state security apparatus, but that he confessed when confronted with the disclosure of the attempt to recruit the American in 1937.

He went on to say that the trail leading to Sir Roger Hollis opened up when British counterintelligence agents learned that the M.I.5 chief had dismissed the investigator who was "attempting to get Blunt to confess."

Mr. Straight, who served from 1969 to 1978 as deputy chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts after appointment by President Nixon, said he was in retirement now and was writing a book "for my grandchildren."